Managing Time As Resource

By BS Murthy

Time has always been the essence of life as the very survival of the humankind is linked to its minutes and seconds, more so in this modern era. The emphatic shift of success in life to material well-being has unequivocally placed the onus on man for an efficient management of time to achieve the same. Be that as it may, time is the only resource that life has bestowed upon all men in equal measure, which no power on earth can deprive them of their un-usurpable share of it. But ironically, the way men manage their time, in the main, brings about the inequality among them, and by extension, among the nations that they inhabit.

If the threshold of patience can be defined as the time lag between the occurrence and anticipation of an event that makes the expectant person impatient, the same can be taken as a measure of the value he attaches for time, which is but the means of his material well-being. The findings of a survey in the economically advanced nations of the West and Japan, way back that is, about the thresholds of patience of their peoples seemingly establish a link between the time sense and the productive quotient. The survey covered such daily chores as waiting for buses, trains, lifts and like public utility services besides professional catering in restaurants and such. And the average thresholds of patience over 'perceived' delays in each category among these peoples were found to be at variance with each others' - the Japanese exhibited lower threshold of patience in each category under the survey, even compared to the methodical Germans and the diligent Americans.

That the average productivity in these nations was in the same order at that time is a pointer to higher sense of time occasioning lower threshold of patience; and that goes to prove that these peoples place a premium on the value of time, and hence their higher grade of impatience over what in general reckoning seem to be marginal delays that even their advanced technologies can't help avert. It is as well that it is this time sense that makes the adherence to time schedules possible in these countries, and that held the key to their continuing preeminence among the comity of nations.

By contrast, however, the defining characteristic of the Indian time sense is epitomized by what is popularly known as Indian punctuality, a euphemism for late coming. Down the line in its long existence, when it was even a beacon of the world, somehow signaling a clear go by to

the value aspect of time, the sense of achievement in the Indian consciousness came to centre on acquiring wealth, never mind the means, and that has come to stymie its transformation from an agrarian society into a modern industrial nation. It is an irony that in its quest for modernization, India lost the opportunity to orient its social ethos towards managing time as a national resource, which forever bedevils it from achieving its true potential owing to this fatal omission.

India's post-colonial investment in public sector enterprises that were expected to yield sufficient returns for further investment in others to follow belied the hopes of the expectant nation. Instead of being the torchbearers of India's march to industrial zenith, these parent ventures turned infertile to become impediments for its economic growth. This sad state of Indian affairs is attributable to the lack of productivity – a synonym for time utilization at economical levels – for the time involved for the fruition of an effort is in direct proportion to the value of time the people associated with it attach to it - China's phenomenal economic turnaround and industrial long jump in recent times amply proves the point that is if proof were ever needed. And proving the point conversely that is, India, whose time sense borders on incurable lethargy, continues to slumber on the path of progress.

It is thus, the plot of the tragic Indian story, as an independent nation, is based on its lack of work culture and the preponderance of characters devoid of time sense. The amount of public time consumed by the State apparatus in its interaction with the public at large is a reflection on India's lack of appreciation for the value of time in nation building. By constant, in interaction with the State machinery, the thresholds of patience levels the Indians have come to cultivate are laid on philosophical lines. It's as if the Indian kids, in their mothers' lap, tend to cultivate immense patience in unceasing waiting at bus stations and on railway platforms so much so that the capacity to keep impatience at bay for hours on end is unmistakably developed in them from childhood itself. No wonder they grow up to become either cynical or insensitive and / or both to the value of time, and so it's time Indians, in general, realize that it is their own lethargy more than their governments' red-tape that is blindfolding their nation in its march to prosperity.